

education program. He returned to Le Grand in 1983 as Superintendent of Schools, a position he held until 1991. Dr. Duran's career with Merced College began in 1991 when he became the Vice President for Administrative Services.

Dr. Duran chaired the Community College League of California's 2010 Commission on the Future. He has served as President of the California Community Colleges (CCC) Chief Executive Officers Board of Directors and President of the CCC Economic and Workforce Development Program Advisory Committee. He was a member of the Hewlett/Irvine Foundation Task Force on Basic Skills Development, the CCLC Board of Directors, and has served as Staff Developer for the California School Leadership Academy.

In addition, Dr. Duran has been involved in numerous community organizations and initiatives, among them include the Greater Merced High Speed Rail Committee, the Merced County Regional Arts Council, the Mercy Medical Center Board of Directors, and the Merced School Employees Federal Credit Union Board of Directors. His professional associations include the UC Merced Foundation Board of Directors, the CSU Stanislaus Community Advisory Board and Center for Public Policy Studies. He is a member of the California Association of Latino Superintendents and a director of the California Dollars for Scholars Program.

Dr. Duran and his wife, Dr. Rose Mary Parga-Duran have two children in college. Dr. Parga-Duran is presently serving as the District Superintendent for the Merced City School District. Upon his graduation he is looking forward to becoming engaged in the community as well as watching his children continue to grow into adulthood. He also is looking forward to spending more time with his eldest daughter and two grandsons who live in Southern California.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in honoring Dr. Benjamin Duran for his dedication to Merced College and our community as a whole.

IN SUPPORT OF H. RES. 289 "COMMEMORATING CARIBBEAN AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH"

**HON. LAURA RICHARDSON**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, June 15, 2012*

Ms. RICHARDSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H. Res. 289, which celebrates June as Caribbean American Heritage Month and recognizes the significant contributions of Caribbean Americans that have made strengthened our country and made it better.

This month also marks the 50th anniversaries of independence for the Caribbean nations of Jamaica and of Trinidad and Tobago. Although a half century has passed since they gained their independence, the struggle they waged to win their freedom still stands as a testament to the ideals of our own great nation.

I am privileged to represent a large segment of Los Angeles County, which is home to the second largest foreign-born population of any major metropolitan area. There are an estimated 500,000 Americans of Caribbean herit-

age living, working, and enriching the quality of life in Southern California.

Mr. Speaker, Americans of Caribbean heritage have made a positive impact on virtually every aspect of American life, including the arts, science, business, education, athletics, military, and government. For example, in the area of government and public affairs America has benefitted from the contributions of Colin Powell, a former Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice; former Members of Congress Mervyn Dymally of California, and Shirley Chisholm of New York, and current Congresswoman YVETTE CLARKE of New York; Kamala Harris, the Attorney General of California; and Maryland Lieutenant Governor Anthony Brown.

American art and culture has been enriched by the legendary performances of Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Cicely Tyson, and Sheryl Lee Ralph; the writings of authors W.E.B. DuBois and Malcolm Gladwell; the music of Grace Jones, Gil Scott-Heron, and Christopher Wallace, "The Notorious B.I.G."; and the prowess of great athletes like Carl Lewis, Tim Duncan, Patrick Ewing, Sandra Richards-Ross, Dwight Freeney, and Ndamukong Suh.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that on June 29 the Caribbean Heritage Organization will be holding the 2012 Caribbean Heritage Salute to Hollywood and the Stars gala in Los Angeles honoring industry stalwarts Sheryl Lee Ralph, Antonio Fargas, Lorraine Toussaint, and Rob Edwards.

I also wish to recognize the leadership of the Institute of Caribbean Studies. The ICS has been very effective in advocating on behalf of the Caribbean American community and each year it hosts a Legislative Conference Week as part of the month long celebration. The conference focuses the attention of policy makers and experts on issues of particular concern to the Caribbean American community such as trade, job creation and economic empowerment, Haitian disaster relief and economic reconstruction. I congratulate the ICS, the Caribbean Heritage Organization in my home county of Los Angeles, and the many community organizations and volunteers across the nation for their efforts in making Caribbean American Heritage Month the success that it is.

During this month I hope all Americans will join with me in celebrating the remarkable history, culture, and contributions of Caribbean Americans to our nation's past and future.

HONORING THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

**HON. MIKE THOMPSON**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, June 15, 2012*

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the 150th anniversary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). I represent the city of Davis, which is home to the University of California, Davis (UC Davis). The USDA has a natural partner in UC Davis given its outstanding history of agricultural research and outreach. In California, USDA has reduced crop pests and disease, protected

over 120,000 wetlands in California, and worked to keep the farming culture strong. I would like to submit for the RECORD the following letter dated May 16, 2012, from Val Dolcini, the State Executive Director of the USDA Farm Service Agency in California. This letter illustrates just a few successes of USDA over the last 150 years and, with our support, their accomplishments will continue in the future.

USDA AT 150: FARMS, FOOD, JOBS

One hundred and fifty years ago, in the midst of a great Civil War, President Lincoln signed legislation to establish a Department of Agriculture to "acquire and to diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture . . . and to procure, propagate, and distribute among the people new and valuable seeds and plants."

Armed with these broad mandates, the "People's Department," as he called it, set about to serve American farmers and a mostly rural American landscape.

At that time, half of all Americans lived on farms, compared with about 2 percent today. The U.S. population in 1862 was about 31.4 million and today, that number has increased tenfold to almost 313 million people.

Since its inception, the department has continued to fulfill Abraham Lincoln's original vision to touch the lives of every American, every day in almost every way. Now, the modern USDA works in food science, agricultural research, nutrition assistance, bio-fuel production, economic and community development, natural resource conservation, international trade, credit and a host of other issues.

By any measure, it's been a very successful 150 years for the USDA. Americans benefit from safe, abundant and reasonably priced food. We produce 85 percent of what we consume and therefore enjoy food security.

Our food, fuel and fiber industries provides employment for more than 20 million Americans, and agricultural exports continue to post significant trade surpluses, which, in turn, have generated almost 1 million jobs alone.

Looking to the future, the USDA must continue the legacy of contributing to the strength and health of the nation by becoming a more modern and effective service provider. We must tighten our belt, just as many Americans are doing with their household budgets.

In the past few decades, American agriculture has become one of the most productive sectors of our economy, thanks to farmers, ranchers and growers adopting technology, reducing their debt and effectively managing risk.

The USDA is adopting these same strategies in its Blueprint for Stronger Service, announced by Secretary Tom Vilsack earlier this year. The blueprint aims to build a modern and efficient service organization that is closely aligned with technological innovations—and better suited to respond to 21st century agricultural challenges.

The challenges ahead are many, both for the USDA and American agriculture. But by focusing on a strong safety net for farmers and ranchers, supporting policies that encourage sustainable productivity, and promoting vibrant markets that help feed consumers at home and abroad, the "People's Department" will continue to help create jobs, support working families, strengthen rural communities and build on the success and productivity of the American farmer.